

Initial: 10/14/09
Reviewed/revised:
Revision:

**MILWAUKEE COUNTY EMS  
OPERATIONAL POLICY  
MANAGEMENT OF  
DECEASED PATIENTS**

Approved by: Kenneth Sternig, MS-EHS, BSN, EMT-P
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**POLICY:** Deceased patients will be managed in a professional and respectful manner, to meet the needs of the community, under the guidelines developed in conjunction with the Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office.

**DEFINITIONS:**

**Resuscitation attempt:** Initiation of basic or advanced life support procedures in an attempt to reverse cardiac arrest of medical or traumatic origin. These procedures include, but are not limited to, CPR, placement of an advanced airway, cardiac monitoring/defibrillation.

**Suspicious death:** Patient's death is considered to be from other than natural causes, including suspected sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), crimes, suicide, and accidental death.

**Non-suspicious death:** Patient's death is apparently due to natural causes.

**Potential crime scene:** A location where any part of a criminal act occurred, where evidence relating to a crime may be found, or suspicions of a criminal act may have occurred.

**PROCEDURE:**

Resuscitation will be initiated on all patients in cardiac arrest, unless one of the following conditions is met:

- Decapitation
- Rigor mortis
- Tissue decomposition
- Dependent lividity
- Valid State of Wisconsin Do-Not-Resuscitate order or Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment
- Fire victim with full-thickness burns to 90% or greater body surface area
- Traumatic arrest with ECG showing asystole or wide complex PEA at a rate less than 30

A responding paramedic may cease a BLS initiated resuscitation attempt if no treatment provided other than CPR, non-visualized airway insertion, and/or AED application with no shock advised **OR** if the patient is in traumatic arrest and the ECG shows asystole or PEA at a rate less than 30. A patient may be pronounced en route to a hospital if condition warrants. In such case, the destination should be changed to the Medical Examiner's Office.

If the patient does not meet criteria in the note above, an ALS resuscitation attempt, once in progress, requires an order from medical control to terminate the attempt, regardless of the circumstances.

Medical control is to be consulted on all questionable resuscitations. CPR and ALS procedures will neither be withheld nor delayed while the decision regarding resuscitation is made.

A paramedic involved in the resuscitation effort shall call the Medical Examiner's Office to provide a first hand account of the scene and patient history. If no paramedic is on scene, a BLS provider who determines the patient meets criteria for no resuscitation attempt shall place the call.

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For a potential crime scene:

- Notify law enforcement if not already involved.
- Include potential crime information in report to Medical Examiner's Office.
- Observe, document and report to law enforcement anything unusual at the scene.
- Protect potential evidence
  - Do not "clean up" the body
  - Leave holes in clothing from bullet or stab wounds intact
  - Do not touch or move items at the scene
  - Observe, document and report to law enforcement and the Medical Examiner's Office any items disturbed by EMS at the scene
- Turn the body over to law enforcement
- Law enforcement has the legal responsibility to maintain scene integrity

For all other patients:

- Do not remove lines or tubes from the deceased
- Do not "clean up" the body
- Do not disturb the scene
- If covering the body, use only a clean, disposable blanket

Disposition of the body:

- Do not leave the body unattended
- The body may be turned over to law enforcement, which has the legal responsibility to maintain scene integrity
- If approval is granted by the Medical Examiner's Office, the body may be turned over to a funeral home
- If the resuscitation attempt took place in the ambulance, include the information in your report and transport to the Medical Examiner's Office at 933 West Highland Avenue
  - Do not transfer the body to another transport vehicle unless the municipality would be left with no available responding ALS unit; refer to individual municipal policy
  - If the death is considered suspicious, a police officer or detective may accompany the body in the ambulance to the Medical Examiner's Office to maintain integrity of evidence
- Transport to a funeral home shall be determined by individual municipal policy

Documentation:

A patient care record will be completed for all expired patients. Documentation will include:

- Pertinent information regarding patient's known medical history.
- Treatment provided; if no treatment was provided, the reason for not initiating a resuscitation attempt.
- The time of determination not to initiate resuscitative measures, or the time CPR was discontinued

A copy of the patient care record is to be forwarded to the Medical Examiner's Office.